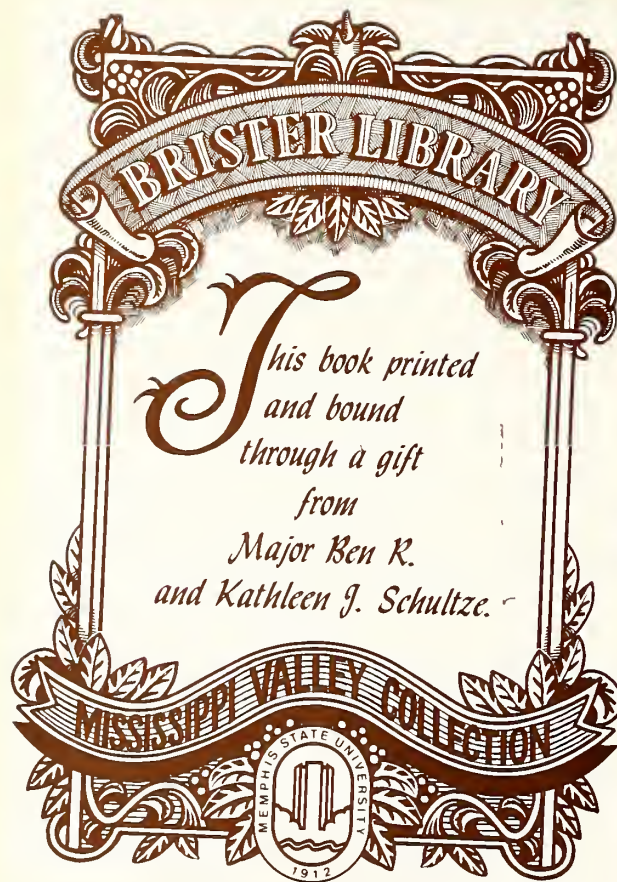


ORAL HISTORY OF THE
TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY
INTERVIEWS WITH
SENATOR ALBERT GORE

BY CHARLES W. CRAWFORD
TRANSCRIBER - BARBARA WASSER
ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE
MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY



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INTERVIEW WITH SENATOR ALBERT GORE

APRIL 5, 1974

BY CHARLES W. CRAWFORD

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PLACE

Lexington, Ky.

DATE

April
March 5, 1974

Albert Gore

(Interviewee)

Chas. W. Crawford

(For the Mississippi Valley Archives
of the John Willard Brister Library
of Memphis State University)

THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THIS PROJECT IS "AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY." THE PLACE IS LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY. THE DATE IS APRIL 5, 1974, AND THE INTERVIEW IS WITH SENATOR ALBERT GORE. THE INTERVIEW IS BY DR. CHARLES W. CRAWFORD, DIRECTOR OF THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE AND WAS TRANSCRIBED BY BARBARA WASSER.

CRAWFORD Senator Gore, I would like to start this record by getting a brief biographical capsule statement from you, in whatever detail you would care to give, up until the time you went to Congress. I know this is available in other places, but for the record we might have a brief one here.

GORE I was born in Jackson County, Tennessee, on a farm near Granville, December 26, 1907. At about four or five years of age my family moved to the adjoining county of Smith, where I was reared and sent to public schools, graduating from high school, then from college. After a short period in college, I intermittently taught and attended college. I became County Superintendent of Schools in Smith County, managed a state wide campaign for the United States Senate for the then congressman Gordon Browning. The campaign was unsuccessful, but successful insofar as I was concerned in establishing a long and happy list of longtime friends, who remained with me for many years. Two years later, just as I was finishing night law school at the YMCA in Nashville, Mr. Browning ran for Governor, and I was active in

that campaign. This was a successful campaign. I became his Commissioner of Labor, in which position I inaugurated unemployment compensation in the state, and administered the Mine Health and Safety Law in the state, thus introducing me to the mining industry. Also, I administrated factory inspections and Workmen's Compensation. In this capacity of Commissioner of Labor, I became very familiar with and very sympathetic to the problems of the people who worked in industry and mining, offices and in business in the state. From the Office of Commissioner of Labor, I resigned after about a year and a half of service and sought the Democratic nomination for Congress from the Fourth Congressional District. My victory was rather substantial in that race. Then I was elected in the general election, became a member of the United States Congress in January of 1939. I remained in the House of Representatives, except for an interval of military service, until January, 1953, when I became a member of the U.S. Senate, where I remained until January, 1971.

CRAWFORD And at this time you are Chairman of the Board of
Island Creek Coal Company, headquartered in Lexington,
Kentucky.

GORE That is right. This is one of the large coal companies,
the principal supplier of coal, for instance, to the
TVA. This company is also the leading coal export company in the
country, so this is not only a nationwide business, but a worldwide
business. I find it very challenging. Not that I chose private

business as a career, but having been promoted to private life through a marginal error on the part of the people of Tennessee, I could see few things more attractive and challenging at this particular time, and possibly offering to me a greater opportunity for contribution, than the energy industry. So I am enthusiastically seeking to make a contribution to the solution of our energy crisis in 1974.

CRAWFORD It seems an important thing to do, Senator, and very interesting as well. You have tried and experienced agriculture, education, and public service [GORE: And law.], so this seems a suitable thing to do. I think it would be apropos, Senator Gore, to ask about your first knowledge of the Tennessee Valley Authority at the time that it started in 1933, from there, say, until you went to Congress.

GORE Well, as a teacher in a rural community in Tennessee, I read with avid interest of the proposal of President Roosevelt for the creation of the TVA. Like most people in the area, I was enthusiastic about it, had faith in its potential. As County Superintendent, to which position I was elected in 1934, I came to have more contact, at least more knowledge, of the TVA and its enactment, its initiation, the unfolding of the program. This was my first experience and knowledge of the TVA. Then, upon seeking election to the Congress, I campaigned as an enthusiastic advocate of and supporter of the TVA concept, the development of the Tennessee River Valley, and I hoped to add the Cumberland Valley to it.

CRAWFORD In the late '30s, Senator Gore, was there any public sentiment against TVA in the state? In other words,

were any political office seekers campaigning against TVA?

GORE Well, that's two different propositions. There was still opposition to the TVA. The stockholders of the old private Tennessee Power Company (not only the stockholders, but the conservative element in the state), which looked upon TVA as some at socialistic, still were skeptical and some openly voiced an opposition. But this was the minority point of view. The whole country, as you must recall, was then in the throes of an extremely serious Depression. The TVA development offered hope to escape from the poverty and economic inertia, the hardships prevailing everywhere, but acutely in Tennessee. So the opposition to TVA was very much in the minority.

 Now to answer your second question. I know of no candidates in that period who expressed opposition to TVA.

CRAWFORD I know that political candidates and officeholders necessarily have a careful perception of what people in their areas are thinking. Did you notice any change during your years in Congress in the state attitude toward TVA? Would you say support for it increased or remained about the same?

GORE Over what period?

CRAWFORD Over the entire time you were in Congress. This is a general thing I would like to know.

GORE Well, TVA had enthusiastic support in Tennessee through the '40s. It came to be accepted, a possession people had without being bothered about it. By the 1950s it was

controversial, more controversial than before, especially with conservatives. I think, however, that General Eisenhower's attack upon TVA, his equivocation about TVA, his ambivalence about TVA in his campaign in 1952 hurt him very materially in the state. The people lost enthusiasm about the TVA rather gradually. Until in the 1960s, it was just an accepted fact of life: why bother about it? Then the ecological and environmental issues began to have a deleterious effect upon sentiment regarding the TVA. So it became less of a popularly supported program. Some people became openly critical. However, I think throughout my period of service, and even now, the TVA is supported by a very large majority of the people of Tennessee. This may not influence their votes particularly, because other issues may weigh more heavily: Vietnam, the race question, economics and so forth. But if that were a single issue, it would be my opinion that throughout the '70s, and even throughout the '60s, and even now, that the TVA would be supported by a large majority of the people.

CRAWFORD I would believe that it was supported most probably by people who lived through the Depression and saw what TVA did at that time. I think, though, it is still appreciated. Many of the younger generation simply have inherited the appreciation of TVA without the same emotional commitment to it that people who were around earlier had.

GORE The same is true of other Roosevelt New Deal programs: Social Security, Bank Deposit Insurance, a whole category of social improvements. Those who lived through the rough

economic period during which these programs were offered as solutions will remember both the conditions and the solutions, and of course that's fresh in mind. The young generations, as you say, accept them as a matter of fact. They seem not to require enthusiasm. This is the generation gap. I can give another illustration. In my first years in politics, Herbert Hoover and the Hoover Depression were favorite political targets. By 1964, I began to find that my audiences were made up of people who didn't have a keen association with, and thus a keen and poignant recollection of, the Depression, so gibes at Hoover and the Hoover Depression no longer struck the spark. So, being a politician with the instinct of the chameleon so far as the sentiment of the crowd was concerned, I found other things to talk about.

CRAWFORD But the support of the Tennessee Valley Authority was a safe position throughout your entire time in Congress. [GORE: Yes, indeed.] I know that TVA relied on you and other members of the Tennessee Delegation during the difficulties of the 1950s, when the Republican Administration came in after the '52 election. What do you feel was your most useful support to TVA during that time?

GORE Well, I became chairman of a subcommittee that handled the appropriations for the TVA and the Atomic Energy Commission. This placed me in a key position, and I used the position as best I could to promote the welfare and to protect the interest of, and also to exercise what influence for good I could,

with the TVA and within the TVA. In that position I led many fights for many of the TVA programs: appropriations for hydroelectric dams, for steam plants, for substations, for transmission lines, for authority, for the issuance of bonds. There were so many fights I can't recall them in detail, but being in the position of chairman of the subcommittee, I was the key advocate in the House of Representatives. Maybe I shouldn't say "key". Well, I guess that's not an unfair... I was in the forefront as the champion, as the author of amendments, as the defender of TVA, as the proponent of programs beneficial to TVA in the House of Representatives. In that position, I would go to conference with the Senate. There would be a number of conferences between the House and the Senate to resolve differences that frequently occurred between the House and Senate bills. So I would say that I would be difficult for me to select any particular incident. It was over a period of years. I was a key in the legislative programs for the TVA. I enjoyed it, I believed in it, I supported it with enthusiasm, and, I believe, with some effectiveness.

CRAWFORD The record, I think, is very clear about that, Senator, and I know how many people in TVA felt about your support. With what people in TVA did you work most closely? You were in contact, I suppose, with Miss Marguerite Owen in the Washington office. [GORE: Oh, yes.] You were given information about the needs of the Authority.

GORE Oh, I worked with all the TVA: the directors from Lilienthal to Aubrey Wagner, as chairman of members of the Authority, the staff of the Authority, the Legal Council, with

engineers, the Power Administrator. I knew them well on an intimate personal basis. I worked with them over periods of years. I formed friendships with them.

CRAWFORD Thank you, sir.



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